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Seventh meeting of persons chairing the
human rights treaty bodies
Geneva, 16-20 September 1996

PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND ANNOTATIONS

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The seventh meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies will be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 16 to 20 September 1996. The meeting will be convened on Monday, 16 September 1996, at 10 a.m.

2. This document contains the provisional agenda for the seventh meeting of chairpersons, prepared by the Secretary-General, together with annotations relating thereto.

GE.96-16827 (E)

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting.

2. Election of the officers of the meeting.

3. Adoption of the agenda.

4. Organizational and other matters.

5. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies.

6. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies.

7. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations non-conventional human rights bodies and mechanisms and regional organizations.

8. Gender perspectives in the work of the treaty bodies.

9. Prevention of human rights violations, including early warning and urgent procedures.

10. Assistance to States in implementing treaty body recommendations.

11. Adoption of the report to the General Assembly.

ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting

The meeting will be opened by the representative of the Secretary-General, who will act as temporary chairperson until a chairperson is elected.

2. Election of the officers of the meeting

A chairperson and a rapporteur will be elected from among the treaty body representatives at the meeting.

3. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting will adopt its agenda, which it may decide to revise at any time.

4. Organizational and other matters

Under this agenda item, the meeting will consider its programme of work. In this connection, it may be noted that in accordance with the chairpersons' recommendations (see A/49/537, paras. 37 and 42 and A/50/505, paras. 24 and 27), representatives of the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system, regional intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, have been invited to the seventh meeting.

Under the same item, the chairpersons may wish to discuss the preparation of the round table on women's health and reproductive rights to be organized by the United Nations Population Fund in the first half of December 1996. Participants in the round table will include experts from each human rights treaty body, representatives from specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations.

5. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies

Under this agenda item, there will be a brief oral review by each participant of recent developments of special concern to the respective treaty bodies.

6. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies

Under this agenda item, the meeting may wish to consider ways further to improve the operation of the treaty bodies. In this connection, the chairpersons will have before them the reports of the Secretary-General (i) on the status of the international human rights instruments and the general situation of overdue reports (HRI/MC/1996/3); and (ii) on improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/1996/2) the latter of which provides information on follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the sixth meeting of chairpersons.

In addition, the following documentation will be provided to the chairpersons:

(a) Report of the fifth and sixth meetings of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies (A/49/537 and A/50/505);

(b) Interim report of the updated study of the independent expert on enhancing the long-term effectiveness of the United Nations human rights treaty regime (A/CONF.157/PC/62/Add.11/Rev.1);

(c) Vienna statement of the international human rights treaty bodies (A/CONF.157/TBB/4 and Add.1);

(d) Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/23);

(e) Relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, including resolution 50/170 on the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights;

(f) Relevant resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights, including resolutions 1996/16 on the status of the International Covenants on Human Rights, 1996/22 on the effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights, and 1996/78 on comprehensive implementation and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action;

(g) Compilation of general comments and general recommendations adopted by human rights treaty bodies (HRI/GEN/1/Rev.2).

7. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations non-conventional human rights bodies and mechanisms and regional organizations

As suggested by the chairpersons at their sixth meeting (see A/50/505, para. 25), Ms. Akila Belembaogo, Chairperson of that meeting, participated in the third meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Special Procedures of the Commission on Human Rights and of the Advisory Services Programme, which was held at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 28 to 30 May 1996. The chairpersons will have before them the report of that meeting (E/CN.4/1997/3). Mr. Bacre W. N'diaye, Chairperson of that meeting, will address the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies during their seventh meeting.

8. Gender perspectives in the work of the treaty bodies

As recommended at their sixth meeting (see A/50/505, para 35), the chairpersons may wish to report on progress made by treaty bodies in considering how they could most effectively incorporate the proposals referred to in paragraph 34 of document A/50/505 into their work practices.

9. Prevention of human rights violations, including early warning and urgent procedures

Under this agenda item, the chairpersons may wish to resume discussion on action to be taken by treaty bodies in cooperation with United Nations organs and bodies to prevent human rights violations.

10. Assistance to States in implementing treaty body recommendations

Several General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights resolutions refer to the usefulness of technical assistance and advisory services in helping States parties to comply with their obligations pursuant to United Nations human rights instruments. At their sixth meeting the chairpersons recommended that all programmes of human rights technical assistance be planned and implemented with the full cooperation and collaboration of all relevant parties, especially those which benefit from a presence in the country concerned. Accordingly, the chairpersons may wish to discuss, in consultation with United Nations organs and agencies and staff from the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant services of the Centre for Human Rights, the progress made in providing assistance to States in implementing treaty body recommendations.

11. Adoption of the report

The seventh meeting of chairpersons will adopt its report to the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

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Seventh Meeting of Persons chairing
the Human Rights Treaty Bodies
Geneva, 16-20 September 1996
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

IMPROVING THE OPERATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

Follow-up action on the conclusions and recommendations of the Sixth Meeting of Persons chairing the Human Rights Treaty Bodies

Report of the Secretary-General

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Introduction

1. The General Assembly first addressed the question of the reporting obligations of States parties under United Nations human rights instruments in its resolution 38/117 of 3 December 1982. Since then, the General Assembly has considered and expressed its concern over problems relating to the reporting obligations under various human rights instruments, as well as their effective monitoring by the bodies created under them, and at subsequent sessions has adopted relevant resolutions reflecting such concerns (most recently, General Assembly resolutions 49/178 and 50/170).

2. The 1st meeting of the chairpersons of the treaty bodies took place in Geneva on 16 and 17 August 1984. The results of that meeting are contained in document A/39/484. The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th meetings of the chairpersons were held at Geneva from 10 to 14 October 1988, 1 to 5 October 1990, 12 to 16 October 1992, 19 to 23 September 1994 and 18 to 22 September 1996, respectively. The reports of those meetings are contained in documents A/44/98, A/45/636, A/47/628, A/49/537 and A/50/505. The 7th meeting of chairpersons has been convened by the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/178, which endorsed the recommendation of the chairpersons that their meetings henceforth be held annually.

3. The report of the 6th meeting of chairpersons was considered by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. Developments relating to the issues discussed at that meeting and the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report are described below.

I. PROMOTION OF THE PRINCIPAL INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

A. Towards universal ratification

4. The World Conference on Human Rights recommended that, when the General Assembly reviewed progress achieved in implementing the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1998, special attention should be paid to assessing the progress made towards the goal of universal ratification of international human rights treaties and protocols adopted within the framework of the United Nations system. In that connection, the Conference recommended that the Secretary-General, in consultation with the treaty bodies, consider opening a dialogue with States not having adhered to international human rights treaties in order to identify obstacles to ratification and to seek ways of overcoming them.

5. Pursuant to that recommendation, a meeting of high-level governmental experts form the African region was convened in Addis Ababa from 14 to 17 May 1996, with assistance from the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity. In addition to representatives of the host Government of Ethiopia, the meeting was attended by governmental human rights experts from the following 16 States: Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Sao Tomé and Principe, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Swaziland.

6. A second meeting of high-level governmental experts, for the Asian and Pacific region, will be held in Amman from 23 to 26 September 1996, with the assistance of the Government of Jordan.

7. The Commission on Human Rights, in its most recent resolutions on the status of human rights instruments (1996/16, 18, 33A and 85) urged all States which had not yet done so to accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to make declarations in favour of the relevant optional complaints procedures contained therein.

8. As at 1 July 1996, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families had been ratified by seven States and signed by two more. It requires another 13 ratifications to enter into force. Fact Sheet No. 24 relating to the issue of migrant workers and the Convention was published recently and should assist in propagating knowledge about the Convention.

9. In its resolutions on the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (1996/8) and on the elimination of violence against women (1996/49), respectively, the Commission appealed to those States which had not yet done so to accede to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

10. The World Conference also called for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by 1995 and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000. That goal has been almost achieved with regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which as at 1 July 1996 has been ratified or acceded to by 187 States. Significant progress has been made towards universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Thirteen States have adhered to it during the past 12 months, bringing the total number of States parties to 153.

B. Reservations

11. The World Conference on Human Rights encouraged States to consider limiting the extent of any reservations they lodged to international human rights instruments, formulate reservations as precisely and narrowly as possible, ensure that none was incompatible with the object and purpose of the relevant treaty and regularly review reservations with a view to withdrawing them.

12. In its resolution 1996/8, the Commission on Human Rights encouraged States to limit the extent of any reservation they lodged to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and to formulate any reservation as precisely and as narrowly as possible while ensuring that no reservation was incompatible with the object and purpose of

the Convention or otherwise contrary to international law. Similar recommendations were made by the General Assembly (in resolution 50/171) and the Commission on Human Rights (in resolution 1996/16) with regard to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

13. During the period under review, the Human Rights Committee received objections from three States parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to certain legal arguments contained in its general comment No. 24 (52) on issues relating to reservations. The Committee has not yet decided on action in follow-up to those observations.

14. In its dialogue with States parties having entered reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has continued to express concern about reservations that raise questions of compatibility with the principles and provisions of the Convention and to encourage States to review their reservations with a view to withdrawing them. Additionally, the Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1996/85, urged States parties to the Convention to review the compatibility of their reservations with article 51 of the Convention and other relevant rules of international law, with a view to considering the withdrawal of those reservations which were contrary to that article or otherwise contrary to international law.

15. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, recommended that States limit the extent of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, that reservations be formulated as precisely and as narrowly as possible and that States parties regularly review their reservations with a view to withdrawing those which are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention or otherwise incompatible with international law.

16. At its fifteenth session in February 1996, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women discussed the issue of reservations and requested the Secretariat to prepare a report including: a review of observations made at United Nations conferences about reservations to the Convention; a review of comments made by women's human rights non-governmental organizations concerning reservations to the Convention; a qualitative comparison of reservations to the Convention with those to other human rights treaties; and an analysis of reservations that are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention or which are otherwise incompatible with international law.

17. In addition, the role of reservations was among the topics addressed at the African regional meeting held in May 1996 to promote universal adherence to the principal international human rights instruments. Assisted by international experts, the participants discussed the importance of limiting reservations to human rights instruments to the maximum extent possible and of ensuring that any reservations made would be compatible with the provisions and principles of the relevant instruments. The topic of reservations will also be addressed in September 1996 at the regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific.

C. Succession of States in relation to human rights obligations

18. It may be recalled that, at their 5th meeting, the chairpersons expressed the view that successor States are automatically bound by obligations under international human rights instruments from the dates of their independence and that respect of their obligations should not depend on a declaration of confirmation.

19. In its resolution 1995/18, the Commission on Human Rights, emphasizing once again the special importance of the observance of universal norms and standards of human rights for the maintenance of stability and the rule of law, reiterated its call to successor States to confirm to appropriate depositaries that they continued to be bound by obligations under international human rights treaties. In this connection, the Commission requested the human rights treaty bodies to consider further the continuing applicability of the respective international human rights treaties to successor States, with the aim of assisting them in meeting their obligations.

20. It may be noted in the latter connection that the Human Rights Committee, at the end of its consideration of the part of the fourth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland relating to Hong Kong at its fifty-fifth session, held in October/November 1995, annexed a statement to its concluding observations in which it, inter alia, took the view that human rights treaties devolved with territory and that States continued to be bound by the obligations under the International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights entered into by the predecessor State. According to that statement, once the people living in a territory found themselves under the protection of the Covenant, such protection could not be denied to them by virtue of dismemberment of that territory or its coming under the jurisdiction of one or more other States.

D. Formulation of new norms and instruments

21. The World Conference on Human Rights called for the elaboration of a number of new norms and instruments. It called on the Commission on Human Rights, in cooperation with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to continue to examine the issue of optional protocols to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. At its eleventh session in November/December 1994, the Committee began to draft an optional protocol that would authorize it to receive communications concerning alleged infringements of the rights provided for in the Covenant.

22. In May 1996, representatives of States parties to the Covenant, the International Labour Organization and a number of non-governmental organizations participated in a day of general discussion on the issue. Some of the topics discussed at that meeting were whether complaints could relate to countries other than those of residence or to international institutions; how economic, social and cultural rights could be made justiciable; and whether the protocol should apply to all or only some of the rights enshrined in the Covenant. The Committee decided to complete the draft text at its session in December 1996.

23. The World Conference also called for the early adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment aimed at establishing a preventive system of regular visits to places of detention. At present, the protocol is under elaboration by an open-ended working group of the Commission on Human Rights. At its last session in 1995, the working group completed the first reading of the draft optional protocol. The Committee against Torture has, on various occasions, provided suggestions concerning the draft text and has designated one of its members to follow developments closely.

24. Additionally, the World Conference suggested that the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women examine the possibility of introducing the right of petition through the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Committee, at its thirteenth session in 1994, requested the Commission on the Status of Women to convene a meeting of independent experts to develop such a protocol. The meeting was convened in 1994 and a draft optional protocol prepared which served as a basis for discussion at the Committee's fourteenth session in 1995. The results of the Committee's discussion are contained in Suggestion 7 of its annual report to the General Assembly (A/50/38). At its thirty-ninth session, in April 1995, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the Committee's suggestion and decided to establish an open-ended working group, which met from 11 to 22 March 1996 and which examined the elements proposed in Suggestion 7, including the overlapping of the proposed protocol with existing procedures and the question of justiciability of the provisions of the Convention. A member of the Human Rights Committee addressed the working group, discussing the Committee's experience with the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

25. At its fortieth session, in April 1996, the Commission on the Status of Women requested the Secretary-General to prepare a comparative summary of existing communications and inquiry procedures under other international human rights instruments and under the Charter of the United Nations. The Commission also recommended that the Economic and Social Council renew the mandate of the open-ended working group and authorize it to meet in parallel with the forty-first session of the Commission in 1997 (resolution 40/8).

26. Pursuant to another request emanating from the World Conference on Human Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child prepared a preliminary draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Subsequently, an open-ended inter-sessional working group of the Commission was established to elaborate a draft optional protocol on the basis of the preliminary draft prepared by the Committee.

27. In accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1995/79 (II), the Secretary-General transmitted the report of the working group to Governments, specialized agencies, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant parties, including the expert appointed to undertake the study on the impact of armed conflicts on children, inviting their comments thereon.

28. In its comments, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed its view that persons under the age of 18 should never be involved in hostilities nor recruited into armed forces. It therefore called for a clear prohibition of participation in hostilities, either directly or indirectly, of persons under 18 to be reflected in the optional protocol and called on States parties not to recruit such persons into their armed forces. The same rule should apply as a matter of principle to voluntary enlistment. The Committee also took note with interest of the proposal on its potential role in monitoring situations where children under the jurisdiction of a State party to the Convention would have been recruited or used in hostilities. The working group will meet again prior to the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights.

29. Pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/90 and Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/9, an open-ended inter-sessional working group was also established to elaborate, in close cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, guidelines for a possible draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, as well as the basic measures needed for their prevention and eradication. The working group submitted the guidelines for the proposed draft optional protocol to the Commission at its fifty-first session in March 1995, which in its resolution 1995/78 decided that the working group, in close cooperation with the Special Rapporteur and the Committee, should elaborate a draft optional protocol based on the guidelines contained in its report (E/CN.4/1995/95, annex I). The working group submitted a report to the Commission on Human Rights containing proposals made by delegations under each chapter of the guidelines.

30. In its resolution 1996/85, the Commission invited the Committee on the Rights of the Child to comment on the draft optional protocol and requested the working group to meet again prior to the fifty-third session of the Commission.

E. Promotion of human rights education

31. In its resolution 49/184 of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, beginning on 1 January 1995 and welcomed the Plan of Action for the Decade, contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/49/261/Add.1).

32. The Plan of Action emphasized the special role of the treaty bodies in formulating appropriate recommendations to States parties with the aim of building a universal culture of human rights. In their concluding observations, the treaty bodies have continued to encourage States parties to give consideration to including in school and training curricula the respective international human rights instrument. States parties have also been encouraged to make those instruments accessible in the framework of non-formal education.

33. On 5 December 1994, at its eleventh session, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights held a day of general discussion on the question of human rights and public information activities relating to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The day of discussion was attended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, various specialized agencies and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. At its twelfth session, the Committee further considered the ideas raised during that discussion and adopted a number of conclusions and decisions on future action, which are contained in its annual report to the Economic and Social Council (E/C.12/1995/18). Concluding that human rights education is itself a human right, the Committee decided: to give regular consideration to the status of implementation of the Plan of Action in States parties; to consider preparing for discussion a general comment on the nature of States parties' obligations under article 13 of the Covenant; to bring to the attention of the High Commissioner for Human Rights possible projects for which the proposed voluntary fund for human rights education might be employed; and to designate one member to assume primary responsibility with regard to education issues.

34. On a number of occasions, the Committee against Torture has emphasized the need to establish educational, informational and training programmes regarding the prohibition of torture that would be specifically addressed to medical personnel, judges, law enforcement officials and police, prison and military personnel.

35. In a joint meeting on 8 August 1995, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities decided that a joint study should be adopted on article 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Article 7 provides that immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, should be adopted by States parties with a view to combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnic groups. Additionally, two of its members have agreed to prepare a draft general comment on article 7 of the Convention for discussion by the Committee in August 1996.

36. In its recommendations to States parties, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has encouraged them to use the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education as a framework in which to launch nationwide campaigns to sensitize the public to the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

37. By its resolution 1996/44 of 16 April 1996, the Commission on Human Rights requested human rights treaty bodies to consider adopting a general comment on human rights education, placing emphasis on the implementation by Member States of their international obligation to promote human rights education.

II. REPORTING

38. In its resolution 50/170 of 22 December 1995, the General Assembly urged States parties to address as a matter of priority the issue of States parties consistently not complying with their reporting obligations.

39. The Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1996/22 of 19 April 1996, also expressed concern about the increasing backlog of reports on implementation submitted by States parties to United Nations instruments on human rights and about delays in the consideration of reports by the treaty bodies. It again urged States parties to make every effort to meet their reporting obligations.

A. Overdue reports

40. During the period covered by the present report, treaty bodies continued to recommend that States parties, in preparing their reports, seek the assistance, if necessary, of the technical cooperation services of the Centre for Human Rights. Additionally, they sent periodic reminders to States parties whose reports were overdue and included information on overdue reports in their annual reports to the General Assembly or, in the case of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to the Economic and Social Council.

41. In the case of long-overdue initial reports, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights continued its practice of examining the situation in non-reporting States parties on the basis of all information available to it. At its latest session, the Committee agreed, in principle, to consider the situation in at least one non-reporting State at each session.

42. Members of the Human Rights Committee continued their practice of meeting, during their spring session, with permanent representatives of States parties whose reports were more than three years overdue in order to stress the importance of fulfilling reporting obligations and to assess whether assistance from the Centre for Human Rights might be beneficial. Additionally, at its fifty-sixth session in March 1996, the Human Rights Committee decided to make available a list of long-overdue reports at the press conference convened at the end of each session.

43. Since August 1991, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has reviewed the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in States parties whose reports are excessively overdue on the basis of their earlier reports, the previous consideration of those reports by the Committee and information from other sources.

44. With respect to the Committee against Torture, the chairperson is requested by the Committee to discuss reporting obligations with permanent representatives or to address letters on this question to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of States parties whose reports are more than three years overdue. In May 1996, the Committee decided - as had the Human Rights

Committee - that a list of States parties whose reports are overdue should be issued separately and publicized at the press conference that the Committee holds at the end of each session.

45. In order to assist States in complying with their reporting obligations, training courses on reporting procedures were organized under the fellowship programme of the Centre for Human Rights in 1996, in collaboration with the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin. A national training course for the preparation of State reports was organized in Togo in April 1996, in the framework of the Centre's technical cooperation programme for that country.

B. Backlog in considering reports

46. A number of measures have been taken by treaty bodies in recent months to reduce the backlog of reports awaiting consideration.

47. At its fourteenth session in May 1996, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reaffirmed its commitment to consider such reports as expeditiously as possible, while ensuring at the same time that reports are reviewed thoroughly.

48. Having agreed to examine a larger number of reports than usual at its forty-ninth session in August 1996, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expects to examine all remaining reports awaiting its attention at its subsequent session, in March 1997.

49. With regard to the rights of the child, it may be recalled that the High Commissioner for Human Rights elaborated a plan of action in 1995 to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Through the plan, which has received financial support from a number of States parties, the High Commissioner seeks to provide the Committee on the Rights of the Child with the resources necessary to strengthen its monitoring activities, to implement its recommendations and, in particular, to increase the Committee's capacity to deal with an ever increasing backlog of reports.

50. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has also been faced with an increasing backlog of State reports, which at 1 May 1996 amounted to 44 reports. In view of that situation, the Committee recommended to the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to the Commission on the Status of Women that article 20 of the Convention be amended to allow the Committee to meet annually for such periods of time as necessary to allow for the effective performance of its functions. The Commission on the Status of Women endorsed that recommendation at its thirty-ninth session in March 1995. At the 8th meeting of the States parties to the Convention, which was convened on 22 May 1995, the proposed amendment was adopted.

51. Subsequently the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/202 of 22 December 1995, approved the amendment. It will enter into force when accepted by a two-thirds majority of the States parties to the Convention. At their 9th meeting in 29 February 1996, States parties recognized the need to introduce temporary measures until such time as the amendment to

article 20, paragraph 1, entered into force and recommended that the General Assembly authorize the Committee, starting in 1997 and within the overall budget framework, to hold two annual sessions of three weeks' duration each, preceded by a pre-sessional working group, to enable it to reduce the backlog of reports.

52. The Committee against Torture at present has no backlog of reports. However, in its report to the General Assembly, the Committee expressed concern at the lack of time available during its two annual meetings to cope with the complexity of its work and the intensive pace of its operations, resulting in particular from the growing amount of information received under its inquiry procedure and the increasing number of communications submitted under the individual communications procedure. The Committee therefore requested the General Assembly to authorize the Secretary-General to schedule henceforth an additional session of one week's duration each year.

53. In June 1996, 22 reports were awaiting consideration by the Human Rights Committee. Since five reports are considered per session on average, the Committee estimates that it will require one year and a half to clear its existing backlog.

C. Reporting burden on States

54. The question of the reporting burden on States was raised once again by the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1996/22, in which, in follow-up to General Assembly resolution 50/170, it urged the treaty bodies and the 7th meeting of persons chairing them to continue to examine ways of reducing the duplication of reporting requirements under the different instruments, including through: (a) identifying where cross-referencing could be used in report writing; (b) recommending, where appropriate, the designation of specific national administrative units to coordinate reports to all treaty bodies; (c) establishing coordination between themselves and the International Labour Organization to identify overlap between their respective instruments and conventions; and (d) consider the utility of single comprehensive reports and of replacing periodic reports with specifically tailored or thematic reports.

55. At its fourteenth session in May 1996, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights discussed ways of enhancing the effectiveness of the reporting process and of reducing the reporting burden on States. It discussed a proposal by its chairperson according to which the existing approach to the consideration of States reports would be significantly altered. The proposal involves maintaining comprehensive initial reports while eliminating the submission of comprehensive subsequent reports, in which States parties are currently required to address all of the issues identified in the reporting guidelines. Instead, the Committee's pre-sessional working group would, on the basis of all the information available to it, identify a limited number of specific issues in relation to which a report would be requested from a State party. The Committee will continue discussion of this issue at its fifteenth session in November/December 1996.

56. In accordance with article 9, paragraph 1 (b) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States

parties shall submit their reports every two years after submission of their initial reports, rather than every four or five years, as provided under other human rights conventions. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has therefore decided to specify, in its concluding observations, as appropriate, whether the next report of a State party should be an updating or a comprehensive report. Additionally, the submission of a report by a State party clears the backlog of all of its overdue reports, since the Committee continues to accept reports representing multiple overdue reports - consolidated in a single document.

57. In order to facilitate reporting by States parties under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child is elaborating guidelines for periodic reports, which it intends to finalize by October 1996.

58. With regard to the Manual on Human Rights Reporting, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, in their resolutions 50/170 and 1996/22, respectively, requested the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that the revised manual would be available in all official languages at the earliest opportunity and that due regard was paid to the recommendations concerning it made by the 5th meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies. The revised manual is scheduled to be published by the end of 1996. Treaty body experts have been consulted with respect to the revision of the manual, which will include a chapter on the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

III. EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF TREATY BODIES

A. Question of a sui generis status for the treaty bodies

59. At their 6th meeting in September 1995, the chairpersons requested the Secretary-General to provide at their 7th meeting a study which proposed ways and means of establishing an appropriate sui generis status for the treaty bodies in the United Nations system. Pursuant to that request, on 5 February 1996 the High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed a letter to the Legal Counsel of the United Nations seeking advice on how the treaty bodies could best be accorded a sui generis status within the United Nations system in respect of their participation in meetings and conferences. The High Commissioner for Human Rights pointed out that, in the chairpersons' view, such a status should clearly distinguish the treaty bodies from the specialized agencies and from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. It should also enable them to participate as fully and actively as appropriate in such meetings and conferences, as well as in the relevant preparatory work of such meetings.

60. In his reply of 21 February 1996, the Legal Counsel stated that "participation in the meetings and conferences of the United Nations is a policy matter which is decided by the Member States on the proposal of one or more of those Member States to the competent intergovernmental bodies which convene such meetings and conferences. It is therefore for the Member States to determine who may participate in their meetings and conferences and in what capacity they may do so. In this context, ... it is the established

practice that the status of observer is accorded to non-State entities which are invited to participate in a United Nations Conference".

61. It may be noted, in this connection, that section XII of the Rules of Procedure of the Functional Commissions of the Economic and Social Council, including the Commission on Human Rights, is devoted to the participation of non-members of such commissions. Any amendment to the rules to provide a separate status in the Commission on Human Rights for treaty bodies could be decided by the Economic and Social Council, in accordance with rule 77 at the recommendation of the Commission.

62. It may be also noted that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 49/426 of 9 December 1994, the granting of observer status in the General Assembly is confined to States and to those inter-governmental organizations whose activities cover matters of interest to the Assembly.

B. Role of non-governmental organizations

63. In its resolution 1996/22, the Commission on Human Rights once again recognized the important role played by non-governmental organizations in the effective implementation of all human rights instruments and encouraged the exchange of reliable information between treaty bodies and such organizations.

64. In follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Centre for Human Rights has published a Handbook on National Human Rights Institutions which provides guidelines for the establishment and strengthening of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, based on careful analysis of the achievements and difficulties of such institutions in various countries and on the experience of the Centre in providing technical assistance. Furthermore, a database of international and national non-governmental human rights organizations has been developed within the Centre which provides information on more than 2,500 organizations.

65. During the period under review, the Human Rights Committee has continued its practice of meeting informally with non-governmental organizations. These discussions are aimed at providing clear insight into the situation of human rights in States parties whose reports are to be considered during a given session. International and local non-governmental organizations have provided exhaustive information, much appreciated by the Committee members. In one instance, the representatives of a State party whose report was to be examined requested to be present during the discussion. After consultation with the non-governmental organizations concerned, the Committee invited the representatives of that State party to attend the informal meeting, although it stated that that type of decision had to be taken on a case-by-case basis.

66. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, at recent sessions, has noted with satisfaction the increasing participation of non-governmental organizations in its work and their constructive contributions. However, the Committee is of the view that closer cooperation should be established between non-governmental organizations dealing with development and those involved in the field of human rights. In the view of the Committee, a coordinating body might be envisaged whose functions could include coordinating activities related to economic, social and cultural

rights with actors outside the United Nations and assisting the Committee in monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - in a way similar to that in which non-governmental organizations provide assistance to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

67. The Committee against Torture has continued its practice of inviting, generally two months before the Committee's sessions, non-governmental organizations to submit information concerning States parties whose reports are scheduled for consideration. Additionally, non-governmental organizations have continued to provide the Committee with reliable information relating to its confidential inquiries on systematic practices of torture under article 20 of the Convention against Torture.

68. Although the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has received information directly from a number of international and national non-governmental organizations, it has not yet developed a procedure whereby it may formally request or receive such information. In that regard, the Committee, at its fifteenth session in 1996, requested the Secretariat to prepare for its next session an analysis of the practice of other treaty bodies with regard to the submission of information by non-governmental organizations and their participation in the meetings of those bodies.

69. At their 6th meeting, the chairpersons recommended that the Secretariat should take measures to facilitate the exchange of information between treaty bodies and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, the Secretariat has made arrangements to provide a number of international non-governmental organizations with the following documents on a regular basis: (a) the schedule of forthcoming meetings of human rights treaty bodies and of the State reports programmed for consideration during those meetings (issued in May and November); (b) when appropriate, copies of the lists of issues treaty bodies address to the States parties before considering their reports; and (c) the provisional agendas and annotations for each session of the treaty bodies.

70. International non-governmental organizations are invited to circulate the above-mentioned documents among national and local organizations, as well as other bodies concerned with the promotion and the protection of human rights at the international, national and local levels, with the request that they make any relevant information available to the treaty bodies in time for their consideration of State reports.

C. Cooperation with regional human rights mechanisms

71. During the reporting period, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights received information from the Council of Europe and the Organization of American States which was taken into account in the preparation of country analyses concerning States' reporting under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

72. In March 1996, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination designated "liaison members" to maintain contact with regional organizations, United Nations non-conventional human rights bodies and specialized agencies.

With regard to the regional organizations, liaison members have sent letters of introduction proposing closer cooperation to: (a) the European Commission against Racism and Xenophobia of the Council of Europe; (b) the European Parliament; (c) the European Union; (d) the European Union Advisory Commission on Racism and Xenophobia; (e) the Commonwealth Secretariat; (f) the High Commissioner for National Minorities of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe; (g) the Inter-American Court of Human Rights; (h) the African Commission on Human and People's Rights; (i) the Council of Baltic States; and (j) the Commonwealth of Independent States.

73. During the period under review, the Committee on the Rights of the Child participated in a number of regional meetings, including preparatory meetings for the World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. It was also represented at a regional consultation on the implementation of child rights in Europe in June 1996.

74. The Committee against Torture has continued its close cooperation with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe and regularly received the reports of the European Committee on visits to States parties to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. These documents form part of the Committee's basic information in connection with its consideration of reports submitted by the same States under the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

75. Furthermore, the Secretariat of the European Commission of Human Rights has agreed to provide the Centre for Human Rights regularly with information on its case-law.

D. Cooperation with United Nations non-conventional human rights bodies and mechanisms

76. At its fourteenth session in May 1996, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights invited the chairperson of the Working Group on Minorities of the Commission on Human Rights to make a presentation on the Working Group's activities in relation to economic, social and cultural rights. The invitation was extended as part of the Committee's regular exchanges with the Working Group on issues relating to minorities. The chairperson of the Committee also made a presentation to the Working Group on the Committee's activities in the field.

77. Both the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child were represented at the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in June 1996 in Istanbul, and participated in the preparatory expert group meeting on the human right to adequate housing convened in January 1996 in Geneva.

78. The officers of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination are scheduled to meet the officers of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in August 1996 to discuss matters relating to the Third Decade to Combat Racial Discrimination. They will also discuss the preparation of a joint study on article 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

79. The Committee against Torture continued its collaboration with United Nations mechanisms dealing with measures to combat torture, such as the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of torture and the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. In the latter connection, it systematically drew the attention of reporting States to the activities of the Voluntary Fund and encouraged them to make contributions to it.

80. As suggested by the chairpersons at their 6th meeting, Ms. Akila Belembaogo, chairperson of that meeting, participated in the 3rd meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Special Procedures of the Commission on Human Rights and of the Advisory Services Programme, which was held at the United Nations Office in Geneva from 28 to 30 May 1996. Mr. Bacre W. N'diaye, chairperson of that meeting, will address the chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies during their 7th meeting.

E. Cooperation with United Nations bodies and specialized agencies

81. In its resolution 1996/22 and previous resolutions on the effective implementation of international human rights instruments, the Commission on Human Rights invited the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies and the treaty bodies to pursue further cooperation among themselves, bearing in mind the responsibilities of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

82. At its fifteenth session in February 1996, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women suggested closer cooperation with UNICEF, pursuant to the importance attached to the girl child in the Beijing Platform for Action, in achieving the objectives of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard, the Committee developed a list of priority subjects following the Platform for Action and identified the agencies responsible. The Committee also expressed appreciation for information provided by the specialized agencies relating to States whose reports were due to be examined and welcomed the assistance and cooperation of the specialized agencies with regard to the implementation of the Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action, including the translation and dissemination of the Convention. The Committee decided to continue to explore channels of cooperation in relation to field activities and to develop further ways to integrate the rights of women into the work of the United Nations system as a whole.

83. The Human Rights Committee continued its practice of having specialized agencies and other United Nations organs participate in meetings of its pre-sessional working group on article 40 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to enable them to provide written and oral information on specific countries. The Committee appreciated the wealth of information provided by the agencies and their level of representation at these meetings.

84. Reiterating the great importance it attached to cooperation with specialized agencies, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted with appreciation the regular submission of information by ILO. It,

however, regretted that UNESCO had submitted information only once and that FAO had never submitted information to the Committee. The Committee also noted with regret that, except for ILO, none of the specialized agencies was present at its November 1995 session. At its session in May 1996, the Committee requested its chairperson to contact officials of the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme, with a view to developing better understanding of the ways in which the Committee and those bodies might collaborate more closely in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee also requested that consideration be given to having those rights placed on the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to ensure that the role of the Committee and an economic, social and cultural rights dimension be considered in the follow-up activities to recent world conferences, including the World Social Summit, the Fourth World Conference on Women and Habitat II. The Committee expressed hopes of strengthening cooperation between itself and interested agencies with regard to those and other activities.

85. In addition, the Committee invited representatives of the specialized agencies to attend the 1st meeting of each of its pre-sessional working groups with a view to enabling them to provide information, in private session, of a more precise and country-specific nature.

86. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, with the assistance of UNICEF, held its fourth informal meeting in the South Asian region in October 1995. During that meeting, the members of the Committee attended a regional thematic consultation on child labour. In June 1996, a Committee member participated as observer in a ministerial-level meeting convened by the Director-General ILO on the prevention and elimination of child labour.

F. Provision of public information

87. During the reporting period, treaty bodies have continued their contacts with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations in order to promote awareness of their work.

88. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights noted with appreciation that a detailed background press release, highlighting aspects of the State reports under consideration and indicating the main issues, was being issued by the Department of Public Information prior to the Committee's sessions and distributed to the United Nations information centres in the reporting countries.

89. State reports submitted to that Committee, to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and to the Committee on the Rights of the Child were made available in the United Nations information centres in the reporting countries prior to the sessions in which the reports of those countries were to be considered. The relevant concluding observations were made available to those centres following the examination of the reports.

90. Since November 1995, an experimental website for the Internet has been developed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights, to be published on the World Wide Web at an early date.

The website was developed to facilitate outside access to information concerning the United Nations human rights programme, including extensive information on the treaty bodies.

91. The Division for the Advancement of Women is also developing a website which would include information on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

IV. SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

A. Staffing requirements and facilities

92. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has informed the treaty bodies of the serious financial situation faced by the United Nations since September 1995. Budget cuts for the biennium 1996-1997 involved, inter alia, the freezing of posts and reduction of financial resources for each and every department in the United Nations and consequently also affected the work of the treaty bodies, particularly with regard to the translation, reproduction and distribution of documents.

93. At its fourteenth session in February 1995, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted decision 14/II, in which it requested the Secretary-General to locate it to Geneva, with servicing to be provided by the Centre for Human Rights. Following the fifteenth session of the Committee, the Secretary-General, in a letter to the chairperson of the Committee, indicated that the programme budget for 1996-1997 did not contain provision for changes in the servicing arrangements for the Committee and that it would continue to be serviced by the Division for the Advancement of Women at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Drawing attention to the importance of integrating the work of the Committee into the mainstream of human rights activities, the Secretary-General gave his assurances that the Division and the Centre for Human Rights would continue to collaborate closely in this respect.

94. While taking note of the financial and budgetary difficulties of the United Nations, the treaty bodies have reaffirmed their need for adequate Secretariat support and, in particular, for a substantial increase in the specialized staff assigned to service them. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has discussed the matter with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, indicating that in the absence of the type of expertise which it has requested, it would not be able to carry out its functions in the most effective and efficient manner possible, nor would it be able to carry out the broader responsibilities which it bears as the only expert body within the United Nations system devoted exclusively to the examination of economic, social and cultural rights.

95. Despite the budgetary constraints, the Centre for Human Rights has begun to implement a long-standing project to establish a human rights documentation centre, as well as to provide office space and facilities for experts and special rapporteurs.

96. In their resolutions 50/170 and 1996/22, respectively, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights again emphasized the need to ensure financing and adequate staff and information resources for the operations of the human rights treaty bodies, and with that in mind: (a) reiterated the request that the Secretary-General provide adequate resources in respect of each treaty body; (b) called upon the Secretary-General to make the most efficient use of existing resources and to seek the resources necessary to give the treaty bodies adequate administrative support, access to technical expertise and access to appropriate databases and on-line information services; (c) requested that the Secretary-General report on that question to the Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights.

B. Computerization

97. Pursuant to a recommendation of the chairpersons and Commission on Human Rights resolution 1989/46, the Task Force on Computerization was established to examine the question of computerization of the work of the treaty bodies. In its report to the Commission (E/CN.4/1990/39), the Task Force recommended computerization as an essential measure to facilitate compliance by States parties with their reporting obligations and to increase the efficiency of the treaty bodies and it urged that a database be developed for the treaty bodies.

98. In accordance with Commission resolution 1990/21 of 23 February 1990 and other subsequent resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, the Secretary-General invited States Members of the United Nations in 1992 and again in 1995 to make generous one-time contributions for the establishment of the proposed database, costs for which in 1990 had been estimated at US$ 508,500. As of 1 July 1996, US$ 111,643 have been received.

99. The Centre for Human Rights has developed a full-text information retrieval and database system. At present, the system contains only information concerning the Committee on the Rights of the Child and is consequently operational only with respect to that treaty body. In order to develop the system and to equip the relevant units within the Secretariat with the necessary tools, the Centre, with the support of UNICEF, purchased computers, CD Rom facilities and other hardware for US$ 44,729. In addition, US$ 20,040 were spent to purchase a server, user licences and other software for the system and US$ 21,431 were used to hire consultants to install the equipment and to develop the database system. Technical training for the staff members involved in the project cost US$ 2,500. The time-frame in which the system will become operational for all treaty bodies depends on the availability of resources for data entry and downloading of full-text documents.

V. GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN THE WORK OF THE TREATY BODIES

100. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action states that "the equal status of women and the human rights of women should be integrated into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activity" and emphasizes that "these issues should be regularly and systematically addressed throughout relevant United Nations bodies and mechanisms" (Part II, para. 37). According to the

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, "if the goal of full realization of human rights for all is to be achieved, international human rights instruments must be applied in such a way as to take more clearly into consideration the systematic and systemic nature of discrimination against women that gender analysis has clearly indicated" (para. 222).

101. At its fortieth session in March 1996, the Commission on the Status of Women encouraged the Division for the Advancement of Women to continue the development of methodologies to analyse gender perspectives in State reports examined by the treaty bodies. Following consultations with the Centre for Human Rights and members of the Human Rights Committee in April 1996, the Division, on the basis of work already undertaken by the treaty bodies and other initiatives, began to develop a methodology by which the treaty bodies might systematically and routinely incorporate a gender perspective in monitoring the implementation of the specific provisions contained in the international human rights instruments. In this regard, the Division will continue to consult the treaty bodies and the Centre for Human Rights.

102. Additionally, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women are working to organize jointly a round table in late 1996 to discuss ways in which the recommendations of recent world conferences concerning women's health, reproductive and sexual health rights might be incorporated into the human rights monitoring and reporting procedures. All six treaty bodies will be invited to be represented at the round table.

103. In its resolution 1996/22, the Commission on Human Rights welcomed the emphasis by the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies that the enjoyment of the human rights of women should be closely monitored by each treaty body within the competence of its mandate, and recommended that the reporting guidelines adopted by each treaty body should be amended to identify gender-specific information that should be provided by States parties in their reports.

104. In order to facilitate discussion by treaty bodies of the implications of gender perspective on their methods of work, the Secretariat made available to them an informal note summarizing the relevant recommendations contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the recommendations adopted by the 6th meeting of the persons chairing human rights treaty bodies.

105. Subsequently, the Human Rights Committee agreed that its general comment on article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (non-discrimination against women) should be updated.

106. In May 1996, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requested two of its members to undertake an initial review of the desirability of revising its guidelines for the submission of State reports, taking into account, in particular, recommendations made by the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

107. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft revision of its general guidelines for the submission of State reports which would reflect the necessity of providing specific information on the human rights of women. The Committee will discuss the draft at its forty-ninth session in August 1996.

108. In June 1996, the Committee on the Rights of the Child began consideration of guidelines for the submission of periodic reports. During that discussion, it stressed the need to ensure that those guidelines give due consideration to the gender perspective.

VI. PREVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, INCLUDING EARLY WARNING AND URGENT PROCEDURES

109. The General Assembly in its resolution 50/170 and the Commission on Human Rights in its resolution 1996/22 welcomed all appropriate measures the human rights treaty bodies might take, within their mandates, in response to situations of massive human rights violations, including bringing those violations to the attention of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the Secretary-General and the bodies of the United Nations competent in the field of human rights. In these resolutions, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights requested the High Commissioner, acting within his mandate, to coordinate and consult throughout the United Nations system in this regard.

110. It may be recalled that, since its forty-fourth session in March 1994, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has incorporated in its agenda an item entitled "Early warning and urgent procedures". Under this agenda item, the Committee may review human rights situations in States parties that give cause for special concern. States listed under this agenda item remain listed until the Committee decides that their human rights situation no longer requires it. Up to its forty-eighth session in March 1996, the Committee has considered under this agenda item the human rights situation in 12 States parties.

111. In the light of events that indicate that the enjoyment of human rights protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights have been seriously affected in certain States parties, the Human Rights Committee has, since its forty-first session in April 1991, requested such States to submit urgently special reports on the situation, generally within three months. Shortly after the closure of the fifty-fourth session, in April 1995, the chairperson of the Committee decided, in view of the deteriorating human rights situation in one State party, to invoke rule 66, paragraph 2, of the Committee's rules of procedures. Acting on behalf of and in consultation with the members of the Committee, he expressed the Committee's deep concern about recent violations of certain provisions of the Covenant. The Government was requested to submit its initial report without delay for discussion by the Committee at its fifty-sixth session in March/April 1996. The report was submitted in February.

VII. ASSISTANCE TO STATES IN IMPLEMENTING TREATY BODY RECOMMENDATIONS

112. During their consideration of State reports, treaty bodies seek to determine whether the reporting States might benefit from the technical cooperation programme of the Centre for Human Rights and recommend, where appropriate, that States parties avail themselves of such cooperation.

113. In follow-up to specific recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, a mission to formulate a project on the administration of juvenile justice was undertaken by the Centre for Human Rights in Viet Nam in March 1996, with the participation of a member of the Committee. A needs assessment mission on the same subject is scheduled to take place shortly in the Philippines.

114. At its fourteenth session in May 1996, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was briefed on the status of technical cooperation projects in a number of States parties. In follow-up to its mission to Panama in 1995, the Committee was informed that an office of a human rights ombudsman had been established by the Government and that a request had recently been received regarding human rights training for law enforcement officers.